**Here's to those beaut geezers who keep our slang alive**

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**Keith Dunstan**

**Maybe we need some updates if we are to save our rhyming slang.**

We know that the Australian language is in peril. Words such as bonzer, boshter, or having a bit of shivoo are as extinct as the Tasmanian tiger. We don't come the raw prawn any more and, as for calling our bathing togs cossies - oh, no, you have to be American. You wear a swimsuit.

Why didn't the National Trust do something about it instead of worrying all the time about old buildings. One gets a bit maggoty about the situation.

Now, about rhyming slang. I'm flat out like a lizard drinking worrying about it. There are those who insist that it is a cockney thing, that it was invented in London's East End in the 1840s. Vendors in the marketplace used it among themselves maybe as a secret language. Very useful it was too in the jails and prison hulks.

The language historians believe the convicts brought it out here so, like Parliament, like the legal system, like our love of beer and cricket, it is a Pommy import.

Others insist rhyming slang is dinkum Ocker and we invented it. It doesn't matter really. Rhyming slang is lovely and we should do all we can to preserve it.

Happily, there are a few geezers who use it all the time. I know one, now in his late 80s, who regularly gets on the strawberry jam. That's a tram, cobber. He was worried, too, about his St Louis Blues. He hadn't polished them that morning.

And at his age his ham and eggs aren't in good shape. All our legs go that way. The same goes for his plates of meat. Yes, feet wear out, don't they?

But his Gregory Peck of a neck is all right and so is his nose. I mean his Lionel Rose. You must be getting the hang of it now.

Skilled operators use shorthand. When you are having a look, you'd never say ''having a butcher's hook'', you'd just say having a butcher's or a captain's instead of a Captain Cook.

In the old days, your wife was always the trouble and strife. "I don't know what's happened to the trouble; best if I go out and have a captain's."

Some rhymers are more affectionate to their troubles. They call them the love and kisses. In other words, the missus.

It can go the other way. The missus might refer to her hubby. "Here it goes again, three times a day I have to feed the fat and tubby."

Then, in the bar, if a character is a bit slow in paying for his kitchen sink, his drink, you tell him to dip into his sky rocket. Yes, his hip pocket.

Mud pies I like. "Look at that sheila, doesn't she have beautiful mud pies?" "And do you like that hunk of gold she has in her Germaine Greer?"

Yes, names have always been popular. Like favour. "Come on mate, do us a Rod Laver." Or pass me the Al Capone. That's a phone.

If we are to save our rhyming slang, then we need to make it a little more right now.

For your computer, tune in to your horn and tooter.

For your iPad, hand over my mum and dad.

And if you are feeling a bit peculiar you have come over all Julia Gillard. Then if you note something that is phoney. No, it's not a phoney, it's a Tony, a Tony Abbott. Then perhaps we won't come a raw prawn any more, we will come a Shane Warne.

Perhaps next time you visit your delicatessen and you need some ham you could say: "Give me six slices off the bone of your Sam Newman and make sure it's fresh."

Possibly there is hope. I offended my old octogenarian mate, just last week. Less polite people might have raised an index finger and said: "Up yours."

No, he was sweeter than that. He said: "Up your flowering gum."

**Keith Dunstan is an author, historian and retired journalist.**

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